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When Jesus Gets Famous

Matthew 4:23-5:11

November 17, 2002

Peter Hiett

Matthew 4:17:

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:23:

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Jesus gets famous . . . becomes big news. The Gospel means Good News.

Last week driving up to the church I noticed the WB2 news truck, "Real News." News trucks always seem to be parked at the overpass taking pictures of the *sky*.

It struck me that we would all go home that night and put everything else aside to watch the news, especially the weather, which would be a picture of what we drove by that day. But because society labels it "news," we watch with wonder. "Wow, honey! The mountain cam!"

Do you ever watch the news and think we're missing the *real* news?

Well, in chapter 4 Jesus gets famous. He makes the news. People come from all the province of Syria (an area larger than Israel). Jesus is preaching the Gospel, the Good News of the kingdom. The kingdom is at hand. And He's healing every infirmity. There are *huge crowds*. I think we'd call it a revival.

People say to me, "Wouldn't it be great if God sent a revival?"

In John 14:12 Jesus says, “He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.” So according to Jesus, it seems we ought to make the news like *He* made the news.

Sometimes I wonder, “Lord, why *aren't* more people healed? Just think of the crowds. You'd be famous, and we'd be blessed. The signs of the kingdom would be evident. Why *aren't* more people healed, Jesus?”

Well, that's a very involved question . . .

1. It certainly appears there are times when God chooses not to heal. In fact, studies show that 100% of His disciples over 125 years of age are *dead*. So at some point their bodies were not healed.
2. It may have to do with the fact we don't *ask* for healing. So I hope we ask expectantly.
3. It may be a lack of faith. Clearly healing is in some way related to faith.
4. It's clear some people have a special gift of faith for healing. But you know, faith isn't something you can simply conjure up. And faith isn't simply an idea in your heart. It's like a deep trusting in the depths of your heart, like a space in your heart that God fills with Himself.

With my head I know God can heal. I've encountered some remarkable medical testimonies. I've felt my own leg grow out at a healing service. I believe, but I know I need help with my unbelief.

Several years ago I received some shocking news. One of my dearest friends, a member of this church, had HIV. I've spoken about her on numerous occasions, many of you know her, and I have permission to tell you her name. But I'd rather just introduce you to her, if you'd like.

Several years ago while she was struggling with various ailments, her doctor gave her the HIV test. She was HIV positive. She went to a specialist who put her on meds. It appears she contracted the virus years before, when she was brutally raped by a man who abused her as a child and was sent by a coven to keep her in fear and shame. She'd been raised in that coven and abused in ways that make any movie from Hollywood seem mild. (Actually, a few others in this congregation have been through the same kind of thing.)

I don't know if I would have believed her story except that on numerous occasions I've encountered the demonic spirits assigned to harass her. Better than that, I've seen the power of Jesus as He drives them out of her life.

It's not subtle, it's not vague, it's not just feelings . . . it's extremely dramatic, a sign and a wonder. Ask Aram, Andrew, or my wife Susan. The power of our Lord is utterly astounding! Yet she still had HIV. For years she felt sick and still had to take the meds. So I agreed to be there and hold her as she died. But now I may not be able to follow through on my promise . . .

About this time last year she asked Ann Trawick, who is a doctor, to give her another test for HIV. We'd been praying, she felt better, and she had even gone off her meds for a year. Ann agreed and gave her the best test she could arrange.

We all gathered in the Cry Room one Saturday night after the service: Andrew, Ann, Aram, Susan, myself, and our friend. With great trepidation she braced herself for the news from Ann. Ann handed her a piece of paper and said something like this: "Um, this is very hard for the doctors to explain, especially for someone that's been off her meds for a year. But medical science can't detect any HIV. I think you're healed."

She's been off her meds now for almost two years, and she feels great. And I believe she's healed.

But now, I don't know *when* she was healed. Was it when we cast out a certain demon? Was it when I commanded HIV to go in Jesus' name? Was it when she prayed alone calling out to Jesus in her room? I don't know. But just think: If we could heal everyone with HIV, LMCC would be on the news! Everyone would say the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus would be famous. We'd have a revival! Just imagine the crowds!

Matthew 4:23 says Jesus healed every disease. He was famous. Verse 25 says great crowds followed Him from all over Syria. And that's the end of the chapter.

Ray Stedman used to say Scripture is inspired by God, but the chapter divisions must be from the devil. Actually, they were added hundreds of years later by monks trying to mark their place. Do your best to forget them . . .

End of chapter 4, start of chapter 5 . . . (Now, if Jesus was an American Evangelical pastor, this would be the point where He would write a book called Revival: How We Did It or Keys for a Dynamic Healing Ministry.)

Chapter 5 verse 1:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him.

When Jesus got famous, seeing the crowds, He “sat down.” When the crowd tried to make Him king, He ran away. (Jesus is *not* a standard American Evangelical pastor.) Seeing the crowds . . . he left and sat down.

Jesus seems rather ambivalent about crowds. Soren Kierkegaard wrote, “The crowd is indeed untruth. Christ was crucified because he would have nothing to do with the crowd . . .” Kierkegaard also said we like crowds because they “abolish our conscience.”

Now that our church is bigger, it scares me how people will listen to my sermons. I sure hope that you have a personal walk with Jesus, or you’ll confuse “the crowd” with “the kingdom,” and you’ll grab snippets of my sermons to justify your sins.

Jesus was ambivalent about crowds, fame, and even healing. Over and over He would heal people and then tell them to keep it quiet. Seeing the crowd, He sits down. Now I’d expect Him to tell us how He did it so *we* could do it. We’d make the news, draw a huge crowd, Jesus would be famous, and we’d all be blessed.

I want the formula . . . because so often I pray for someone’s healing, and when they don’t get healed I feel:

- inadequate (so poor in my spirit)
- sorry for the person I’m praying for (we just mourn)
- humbled (meek)
- I so much want to see everything put right

Seeing the crowd Jesus sat down . . .

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

If you want “the blessing” . . .

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

Blessed, fortunate, deeply happy. Luke simply records, “Blessed are the poor”—the destitute. So it at least means those who have nothing to depend on in and of this world, not even a healthy body. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” — I think that also means those whose own spirits are destitute and weak, with a space in their hearts for God to fill.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Someone said, “They had *better* inherit it, for that’s the only way they’ll get it.” Well, that’s the only way *anyone* gets it in the end: by grace. Meek doesn’t mean passive or lacking in courage, but humble and surrendered. Moses was meek (Numbers 1:23); Jesus was meek (Matthew 11:29).

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Blessed are those who weep Rachel’s tears. It was my friend who was instructed by Jesus to let go and weep. I told you about her tears in His bottle. Blessed are those who mourn a fallen world and a broken heart.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” If you think you are righteous, this isn’t describing you. He says, “Those who hunger for righteousness” are blessed. If you’re satisfied with your own righteousness, you’ve got the wrong religion, and I’m truly sorry for you. Your life must be Hell. “You are blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God” (The Message). “He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” The merciful, forgiving, compassionate — for “the measure you give is the measure you get.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Pure in heart. Did you notice all these blessings have to do with the heart, the interior of a person?—that which never makes the news, that which is entirely personal?—your domain, so to speak?

You can’t control the teaching you get, the preaching you hear, or the miracles you see. You can’t control the crowd. But can you surrender your own heart? Do you want to see the kingdom? Well, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

In the words of Kierkegaard, “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” and what is it we’re to will? God. What is God? God is love. And where can we see love? Even in the last and the least.

Paul writes to Titus, “To him who is pure all things are pure.” Like, “The one with the pure heart can find God in every rock, every flower, even every cross.” Was there anything ever more horrifying and impure than the cross? Can you see God there? Then I bet you can see Him anywhere . . . kind of like the kingdom really *is* at hand . . . if only the eyes of our hearts were truly opened to see. Then the kingdom wouldn’t be a matter of signs and wonders to be observed, crowds to follow, teachings to get, or sermons to hear. At any moment it would be a matter of the disposition of the heart, like faith, hope, and love.

I’ve spent countless hours praying with my friend, and usually those times of prayer involve going back to horrifying pictures in the past (that my wife also sees in visions). There we ask Jesus to help us see Him. He purifies her heart, and then we see He’s always there. He’s doing things . . . like hanging on crosses; raising the dead; holding, washing, and embracing my friend. And when the eyes of her heart see Jesus with faith, hope, and love, Satan himself doesn’t stand a chance in Hell. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” He said, “Blessed are the *peace-makers*, not the *peace-havers*. There are those who live in the suburbs and avoid all conflict; always say nice things and think they are peacemakers. They are *peace-deniers*.”

Shalom (Biblical peace) is the presence of all good things in their place. Peace is the presence of the kingdom. Peacemakers will be called sons of God, and the Son of God is also the Prince of Peace. He said, “I came not to bring peace but a sword.” So blessed are those who will use God’s weapons to fight for peace.

There came a day when the Prince of Peace was no longer famous but infamous . . . when He performed no sign and didn’t even heal Himself. It was when *the crowd* nailed Him to the tree. It was then He “made peace by the blood of His cross.”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”

When Jesus got **famous** He said to His disciples and to the **crowd** seeking the **kingdom of Heaven** . . .

“Blessed are you when you’re **not famous** and the **crowd** hates you, for you *are* the **kingdom of Heaven.**”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” — That’s not a very exact translation. The literal Greek construction of this last beatitude and the first is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit and the persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for ‘autos’—*of them*—is the kingdom of Heaven.” Not only is the kingdom *theirs*, but the kingdom of Heaven *consists* of them.

Remember that when John sees the New Jerusalem coming down in The Revelation, his name is on the foundation. The New Jerusalem is literally built of God’s people, and it’s shaped like the temple, and God *lives* there.

In Luke 17 Pharisees come to Jesus and ask Him when the kingdom of God will come, and Jesus says, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation [in RSV: signs to be observed]; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

So, “seeing the crowd Jesus sits down.” I think He’s saying . . .

“Guys, don’t play to the crowd. Don’t confuse the crowd for the kingdom. The kingdom is in your heart.”

“Guys, don’t seek signs. Don’t confuse signs with the kingdom. The kingdom is in your heart.

“Love people, cast out demons, and heal people in my name, but don’t seek signs. Seek the kingdom.”

Twice in Matthew Jesus says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign.” Often when I get depressed and don’t feel blessed, I run off seeking crowds, fame, and signs. When you seek the kingdom, don’t seek the crowd, the signs, or the famous. Don’t depend on the latest teaching or the best preaching. When you seek the kingdom, seek the *King*.

Look in your own heart and ask yourself:

- Am I destitute for Jesus?
- Am I willing to mourn?
- Am I humble?
- Am I hungry for righteousness?
- Am I merciful?
- Am I pure in my desire?
- Do I seek peace?
- Will I suffer for righteousness?

If not, confess it to Jesus. Then look at Jesus.

(You see, I'm not convinced you can surrender your own heart. "Can you surrender your own heart?" Only when you see Jesus.)

Adulterers seek the signs of love: security, gifts, and pleasure. But they don't seek Love. He is a person. Seek and you will find.

I think signs and wonders are *easy* for God. But to conquer your heart He left His throne, hung on a cross, and descended into Hell. Look at Jesus.

When you see His love for you, your arrogant heart breaks, and you become . . .

poor in spirit,
 mourning and meek,
 hungry for Him,
 merciful like Him,
 desiring only Him,
 willing to suffer for Him.

Your heart is opened . . . a space is made and Heaven invades your heart. Heaven is in your heart.

So when people come to me and say, "Wouldn't it be great to observe revival in our church?" . . .

1. I want to say, "Yes!" Yes, I'd *love* it if there were more dramatic conversions, healings, and bigger crowds.
2. I want to say, "Yes!" and "I'm sorry," for I'm convinced I lack faith in many areas.
3. I want to say, "Yes!" and "I'm sorry" and "I hope you haven't missed it."

I'm not sure what you mean by revival, but I *do* know the kingdom of Heaven consists of the "poor in spirit," and the kingdom is at hand. Perhaps then "the blessing" isn't *out there* waiting to be found as much as *in here* waiting to be discovered, like treasure. "For the kingdom does not come with signs to be observed. They won't say, 'Oh, it's in *this* place or *that* place,' for the kingdom is within you."

I think the thing that amazes me most of all, in all the years of praying for my friend, is how utterly concerned our Lord is with her heart. Being healed of HIV just didn't seem to be a big thing to Him . . . no visions, no words of knowledge, no shaking . . . it just happened.

By the way, if you have HIV, God will take it away in eternity. And He might even take it away here. Whatever the case, "His grace is sufficient for you, and

His power is made perfect in weakness.” If you want to see the beauty of the kingdom, check out the heart of folks at HIV CareLink.

But for God, healing bodies, casting out demons, and signs and wonders just seem remarkably easy. It’s been absolutely obvious in my friend that God has absolute power over demons, Satan, and disease. So then many times I’ve asked

God, “Why did we have to pray *all night*, chasing some demon?” That is . . .

“Why the broken spirit, why the mourning, why the surrendering, why the hungering for you, why the areas of forgiveness, why did we have to go back and see you in all those places of pain, why did we have to witness those persecutions?”

“God, in an instant you could have *fried* every demon and every disease forever in Hell!”

I think He has answered me many times: “Yes, yes, I could have. But then you wouldn’t have spent all those hours caring for the heart of my beloved. And you, Peter, would have missed the splendor of my kingdom and the beauty of its King.”

Over and over in those visions Jesus stands in my friend’s presence and stands *with* her and *for* her, and in order to *receive* her in honor.

Jesus, seeing the crowd, sat down. That was the posture of a rabbi—a teacher—teaching his students. He sat down.

A young man played Mozart in a concert hall in Great Britain. At the end everybody stood and cheered. But he wouldn’t play an encore. The proprietor said, “They’re all standing. Play an encore!” The young man said, “In the balcony in the corner an old man is sitting.” The proprietor said, “Oh, he doesn’t know his music. The crowd is standing!” The young man replied, “He knows his music. He is my teacher. If the whole crowd were sitting but that one man standing, then I’d play an encore.”

Clive Calver points out that there’s one place in Scripture where Jesus, seated, is said to stand. In Acts 7 Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, stands.

- He stands when there were no healings.
- He stands when the crowd turns on a fellow named Stephen.
- He stands as Stephen forgives them, for they know not what they do.
- He stands as the crowd falls on Stephen and stones him with stones.

I doubt it made the news in Rome. But it was news in the kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is already famous in Heaven forever. But when He becomes famous in your heart, that's *real news* . . . and you become famous like Him.

I believe Jesus *will* stand for you, because He's already hung on a cross for you. He gives you His body and His blood, saying, "Take and eat." Then behold! Not only the kingdom but the *King* is inside you. "Blessed are you."

"So, Lord Jesus, we pray that as we come to this table you would romance our hearts to yourself, that they would be open to you, fertile soil for you; that you, Lord Jesus, the Living Word, would be dropped into that soil, the One who truly is pure of heart, meek, mourning, and hungry, so hungry for righteousness that you hung on a cross, that you would live your life in us."

For on the night that Jesus was betrayed . . . the night that Judas betrayed Him and all His disciples abandoned Him, for in the morning the crowd would turn against him and the crowd would have Him crucified chanting, "Crucify! Crucify!" . . . *that night* He took bread and He broke it, and He said, "This is my body given for you. Do this [*this*] in remembrance of me."

And in the same way after the supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me" — "remember this about me."

Take and eat. In His name, amen.

So far in the Gospel of Matthew, since Jesus has been baptized in the Holy Spirit we've seen Him led by the Holy Spirit out into the wilderness where He's hungry and thirsty and tempted by the devil forty days and forty nights. And some of you feel like you've been there.

Then He goes throughout all Galilee, and all Syria comes out to see Him, and He heals every disease and every infirmity. And some of you have walked in places like that. I feel like I've tasted that . . . and just about everything in between. You know, with all those things going on, at times I get neurotic and stressed out. At certain points I begin to ask, "Where *is* Jesus?"

If you're wondering, maybe He's sitting on the hillside, waiting for you. Maybe you just need to go sit on the side of the mountain with Him for a while and remember that you're blessed. For the King has chosen to make your heart His home. In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

We prefer to “be part of a group,” and to “form a party,” for if we are part of a group it means goodnight to conscience. . . . The only thing the group secures is the abolition of conscience.
Soren Kierkegaard

The crowd is indeed untruth. Christ was crucified because he would have nothing to do with the crowd (even though he addressed himself to all). He did not want to form a party, an interest group, a mass movement, but wanted to be what he was, the truth, which is related to the single individual. Therefore everyone who will genuinely serve the truth is by that very fact a martyr. To win a crowd is no art; for that only untruth is needed, nonsense, and a little knowledge of human passions.

Soren Kierkegaard

Christians have fallen into the habit of accepting the noisiest and most notorious among them as the best and the greatest. They too have learned to equate popularity with excellence, and in open defiance of the Sermon on the Mount they have given their approval, not to the meek, but to the self-assertive; not to the mourner, but to the self-assured; not to the pure in heart who see God, but to the publicity hunter who seeks headlines.

A.W. Tozer

America’s Beatitudes . . .

Blessed are those who believe in themselves, for they will be successful.
Blessed are those who are in touch with their feelings, for they will feel good.
Blessed are the self-assertive, for they will get ahead.
Blessed are the open-minded, for they will be respected.
Blessed are the tolerant, for they will be accepted
Blessed are those who are in good shape, for they will be envied.
Blessed are the sensitive and fun-loving, for they will find intimacy.
Blessed are the popular, for theirs is the world.

Doug Webster

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said: “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought. You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat. You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for. You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family. You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Matthew 5:1-12 paraphrased in The Message by Eugene Peterson

Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly. . . . In the old Christian pictures the sky over every figure is like a blue or gold parachute. Every figure seems ready to fly up and float about in the heavens. The tattered cloak of the beggar will bear him up like the rayed plumes of the angels. But the kings in their heavy gold and the proud in their robes of purple will all of their nature sink downwards, for pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One “settles down” into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise to a gay self-forgetfulness.

G. K. Chesterton

Someone once said that the spiritual significance of something is in inverse proportion to the publicity surrounding it. A publicized event, like a parade, is more spectacular than it is significant. And that is true even if the parade is a religious one.

Ken Gire

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Matthew 12:38-39

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 17:20-21

And I was still awake, and then our Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the middle of my heart. I saw my soul as large as if it were a kingdom; and from the properties that I saw in it, it seemed to me to be a glorious city. In the centre of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, glorious, highest Lord; and I saw him dressed imposingly in glory. He sits in the soul, in the very centre, in peace and rest, and he rules and protects heaven and earth and all that is.

Julian of Norwich

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Lookout Mountain Community Church

534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401

Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361

E-mail: info@lomcc.org